

30 April 2025

The Chief Executive
Dunedin City Council
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Tēnā koutou

Technical Advice on 2025–2034 9 Year Plan

1. This technical advice has been compiled by the National Public Health Service (NPHS) Te Waipounamu Region, Health New Zealand - Te Whatu Ora. NPHS Te Waipounamu services the South Island including the Otago region.
2. NPHS recognises its responsibilities to improve, promote and protect the health of people and communities of Aotearoa New Zealand under the Pae Ora Act 2022 and the Health Act 1956.
3. Pae Ora requires the health sector, as one of its roles, to protect and promote healthy communities and health equity across different population groups by working together with multiple sectors to address the determinants of health.
4. NPHS is focused on the achievement of equitable health outcomes. We use the Ministry of Health's definition of equity:

In Aotearoa New Zealand people have differences in health that are not only avoidable, but unfair and unjust. Equity recognises different people with different levels of advantage require different approaches and resources to get equitable health outcomes.¹

5. This technical advice sets out matters of public health interest and concern to NPHS Te Waipounamu, and the information included is based on evidence about public health and equity.

General Comments

6. The future health of our population is not just reliant on hospitals, but on a responsive environment where all sectors work collaboratively to address the determinants of health.
7. NPHS Te Waipounamu is pleased to see a focus on public health related issues being considered throughout the 2025–34 9 Year Plan with emphasis being placed on resilient

¹ Ministry of Health. Achieving equity [internet]. Wellington: Ministry of Health [Updated 2024 March 6; cited 2024 April 17]. Available from: <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/whats-happening/about-us/who-we-are/achieving-equity/>

can lead to increased hospital admissions and place strain on the health system.^{5,6} The 9 Year Plan's commitment to improving existing community housing units is a positive step and we believe that investment in community housing is an investment in public health and equity. Research from New Zealand indicates that stable social housing is linked to improved health outcomes, including lower hospital admission rates.⁷

Homelessness

22. We acknowledge the Council's efforts to address homelessness through its Housing Plan 2022, and Housing Implementation Plan 2024–2026. We also support the work the Council is undertaking to coordinate the inter-agency responses, particularly in understanding the needs of homeless people with a view to finding them effective solutions to their issues. Given that homelessness remains a significant issue in Dunedin, the current plan could benefit from a more explicit focus on this issue.
23. Homelessness is strongly linked to poor mental and physical health, increased hospitalisations, and delayed access to care, which address pressure on the health system.⁸ Quality of Life Survey 2024 shows that homelessness is perceived as a growing issue in Dunedin highlighting the need for visibility of this issue in long-term planning documents.⁹

Accessibility and Inclusive Design

24. We also recommend incorporating inclusive and universal design principles into both upgrades and any new residential building. This ensures that the houses are suitable for people at all stages of life and abilities, including disabled and older people. BRANZ research has shown that it is considerably cheaper and less disruptive to build universal design features into a new home than to retrofit the same house later.¹⁰
25. We recommend incorporation of universal design principles across all built environment projects to ensure they are accessible to all, regardless of age, ability, or circumstance.
26. While accessibility is addressed in some parts of the 9 Year Plan like improvements to footpaths, bus shelters, changing places facilities and upgrades to playgrounds, we

⁵ Howden-Chapman P, Fyfe C, Nathan K, et al. The effects of housing on health and well-being in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Population Review*. 2021;47:16-32.

⁶ Taylor L. Housing and health: an overview of the literature. *Health Affairs Health Policy Brief*. 2018 Jun 7;10(10.1377).

⁷ Baker M, Zhang J, Howden-Chapman P. Health impacts of social housing: Hospitalisations in Housing New Zealand applicants and tenants, 2003-2008. Wellington, New Zealand: He Kainga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme, University of Otago; 2010 Jun.

⁸ Hwang SW. Homelessness and health. *Cmaj*. 2001 Jan 23;164(2):229-33.

⁹ Ipsos. Quality of Life Survey 2024: Results for Dunedin. A report prepared on behalf of Dunedin City Council. Available from: https://www.dunedin.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1119629/final-qol-2024-dunedin-report.pdf

¹⁰ BRANZ. Study Report SR 263 [2011]. Available from: https://d39d3mj7qio96p.cloudfront.net/media/documents/SR263_Lifetime_housing_-_the_value_case.pdf

encourage the Council to consider accessibility as a core design principle, and to embed it across housing, transport, urban centres, and community facilities.

27. Dunedin's population of people over 65 years of age is projected to grow by 42% by 2054.¹¹ Nationwide, disability rates are increasing, especially among Māori. This highlights the need for stronger investment in accessible environments. Currently one in four New Zealanders lives with a disability, and many face barriers in accessing transport, education, health care, and community facilities.¹² In Dunedin, these challenges are often compounded by the city's hilly terrain.

Sub-Urban Centre Upgrade

28. We support the proposed upgrades to suburban centres as they contribute to a range of factors that support mental and physical health outcomes such as accessibility, social connection and physical activity and equity.
29. The built environment plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion within communities by creating spaces that encourage social interaction and a sense of belonging. Design features such as public spaces, walkability, and connectivity can enhance community cohesion and support wellbeing. Research shows a strong link between social capital and the built environment, specifically between social cohesion and access to destinations or walkability.¹³ We therefore support the idea of development and improvement of facilities that help foster these kinds of community connections and reduce social isolation. Examples include public space upgrades, destination playgrounds and other inclusive and accessible community facilities.
30. According to the New Zealand Health Survey 2023/24, most adults in New Zealand report low or moderate psychological distress, but 13% experience high or very high levels. Mental distress is higher among young adults, disabled people, Māori, and Pacific communities, and has increased over the last five years.¹⁴ Further, a 2023 infometrics report highlighted that Dunedin has a persistently higher suicide rate than the national average¹⁵ underscoring the

¹¹ Dunedin City Council. Draft city snapshot profile of Dunedin City to support 10YP. Available from: https://www.dunedin.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/993903/Dunedin-City-Snapshot-2023.pdf

¹² Health and Disability System Review. Health and disability system review—final report—Pūrongo Whakamutunga. Wellington: HDSR; 2020

¹³ Mazumdar S, Larnihan V, Cochrane T, Davey R. The built environment and social capital: A systematic review. *Environment and Behavior*. 2018 Feb;50(2):119-58.

¹⁴ Ministry of Health. Annual Update of Key Results 2022/23: New Zealand Health Survey. Available from: [Annual Update of Key Results 2022/23: New Zealand Health Survey | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

¹⁵ Infometrics. Regional Economic Profile: Age composition; 2024. Available from: <https://rep.infometrics.co.nz/dunedin-city/health/suicide-rate?compare=new-zealand>

need for investment in environments that strengthen social ties, reduce isolation and support mental wellbeing.

31. We also support the Council investment in places like Community Halls and Community Centres as these spaces play a vital role in fostering social connection and supporting community resilience. Research following Cyclone Gabrielle shows that community centres and marae were critical in emergency response, providing shelter, support and coordination.⁴

Partnership with Mana Whenua

32. NPHS Te Waipounamu commends the Council's commitment to partnership with mana whenua and welcomes the shift from principle to action through establishment of Te Pae Māori and adoption of Te Taki Haruru. These will contribute to improving equity and culturally responsive health and wellbeing outcomes.

Smokefree/Vapefree Policy

33. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the Council to update and refresh the current smokefree/vapefree policy. While not explicitly covered in the draft plan, we believe a smokefree and vapefree environment is an important issue to raise. NPHS Te Waipounamu notes that the Council's current smokefree policy is now ten years old. Additionally, with vaping becoming more common and changes to the legislation,¹⁶ it is important that the future smokefree policy also addresses vaping. We have specialist staff in our service who would be more than willing to assist the Council in this regard.

Summary

34. Water – Support the renewal of the city's ageing three waters infrastructure, especially climate considerations and that it reflects an equity focused approach.
35. Transport – Support investment in accessible, safe, and low-emission transport that contributes to healthier lifestyles, climate goals, and social connection.
36. Climate Change – Support the Council's strong climate commitments and the integration of climate action across core areas and recommend city-wide strategies for climate change.
37. Waste Management – Support Council's decision to develop and manage the Smooth Hill landfill as it improves resilience and reduces emissions in line with climate goals.
38. Housing – Support ongoing investment in community housing, which is key to improving public health and reducing health inequities and recommend stronger focus on homelessness.

¹⁶ Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Amendment Regulations 2023. Available from: [Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Amendment Regulations 2023 \(SL 2023/201\) \(as at 06 March 2024\) – New Zealand Legislation](#)

- 39. Accessibility and Inclusive Design – Support stronger investment in accessible environments, especially given Dunedin's ageing population and rising disability rates.
- 40. Urban Centre Upgrades – Support suburban centre upgrades for their role in supporting health through improved walkability, social connection, and access to public space.
- 41. Smokefree/Vapefree Policy – We welcome the opportunity to work with the Council to refresh the smokefree/vapefree policy to reflect current challenges and protect public health.
- 42. Partnership with Mana Whenua – Commend the Council's active partnership with mana whenua, which supports equity and culturally responsive approaches to wellbeing.

Conclusion

- 43. NPHS Te Waipounamu will wish to be heard with respect to this technical advice.

Ngā mihi



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